



7 March 2023

Re: Support for Senate Bill 1148

Dear Honorable Members of the Environment Committee,

Safari Club International (SCI) supports Senate Bill 1148 which would authorize a limited black bear hunting season in Connecticut. SCI respectfully seeks your leadership in supporting this bill, which would contribute to the scientific management of black bears and reduce their associated public safety impacts in the state. This bill is a prime example of the crucial role that hunting plays as a wildlife management tool. SCI is dedicated to protecting the freedom to hunt and promoting wildlife conservation worldwide and, for the above reasons, SCI strongly supports this bill.

The black bear population in Connecticut has been growing for a number of years, with a consequent increase in human-bear conflicts. The trained professionals at the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) acknowledge that the state's black bear population is "increasing and expanding" and that "...the resident population, including juveniles, is estimated to be around 1,000-1,200. The majority of the population inhabits the northwest quarter of the state but is continuing to expand into suitable habitat in eastern Connecticut." Additionally, the DEEP acknowledged suitable habitat for black bears is now more widespread. Being so, the "rapid increase" in bear population – and associated human-bear interactions – which has occurred over the last 20 years, is expected to continue. Yet, discussions over the proper management of this species have, unfortunately, been most often dictated by emotion instead of science.

Senate Bill 1148 is a first step to managing the bear population to ensure its growth does not outpace the tolerance of people living in or near suitable habitat. While Senate Bill 1148 is a welcomed measure, SCI strongly recommends that the proposed bear hunt lottery season, limited to 50 tags and specific to one county, be expanded to include a larger area. Given the growth rate and expanding black bear population, limiting potential harvest to one county will have limited impact on the state's overall population, and is unlikely to significantly lower human-bear interactions outside of that county. The DEEP's reported black bear sightings note three other counties with as many or more black bear sightings than Litchfield County.

SCI understands that many wish to focus on conflict mitigation instead of approving a policy that incorporates a regulated hunt. To be sure, conflict mitigation is a necessary part of bear management, in particularly where bears and humans share the landscape. But conflict mitigation is more effective when hunting is used both to help achieve bear population management objectives and to keep bears in appropriate habitat. The most effective, impactful, and proven method for stabilizing black bear populations is regulated hunting.



Although SCI generally supports wildlife management decisions coming from the professionals in the DEEP, we support this bill because it is necessary to provide management flexibility for Connecticut's growing bear population. To avoid unchecked growth of the black bear population and reduce human-bear conflicts, SCI supports active management of black bears including a robust population estimate and explicit harvest goals tied to that estimate. SCI fears that, without such measures, the state may otherwise have to address public safety issues caused by a growing bear population in a densely populated state.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on Senate Bill 1148 and for your consideration of this important conservation and wildlife management measure.

Sincerely,

Sven Lindquist
President - Safari Club International